

Say it with flowers

Richard Barr celebrates turning 65 by not acting like an old man – and so should all his fellow crinkleys, he says



Suddenly age becomes important. So when the twenty-something lady in the North Walsham flower shop (the Daisy Chain – I recommend it. They provide a bouquet every week for our holiday cottage – I recommend that too. Commercials over), told me that her father was in hospital with kidney failure I was very concerned. But then she added that he was 98 and I pricked up my ears. If her father was 98, he would have been older than I am now when his daughter was born. That seemed to be going some, and I said so. There was hope for the future – not that I was planning any begetting now or any time soon. She looked perplexed before correcting me: it was her grandfather who was in hospital. I slunk out of the shop in confusion leaving a trail of petals behind me.

Younger older people

I am mulling over this because July saw a milestone in my life that I had not been looking forward to passing – a milestone that read “you are now a pensioner”.

It was not a happy milestone for Leslie Seldon either, the partner told by his peers that, as per the partnership deed, he should retire. Seldon wanted to carry on as a partner because – like many of us – he could not afford to retire, but his partners had other views. He took them to the Supreme Court and lost. You can be put out to pasture by your peers whether you like it or not. I wonder if the justices read the unkind comment at the end of one of the press reports of the case: “Lawyers never really retire. They become retired legal advisors until they start to go senile, then they become judges.”

As the day drew near, I started to cast around for younger people who are much older than I am. There are plenty to choose from. David Attenborough, for instance, seems young and sprightly at the age of 86 as he tramps through jungles. Then there

is Bruce Forsyth who at 84 retains the wit and agility of – er – a 65 year old. And the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, at 86 and 91 respectively are not showing their age (apparently Her Majesty can even parachute into an Olympic arena).

But closer to home there is also Brian Hughes. Brian is a solicitor from Essex and was until very recently on the Council of the Law Society. He also “died” three years ago.

He had been swimming at his local baths. He had done 11 lengths and had reached the end of the pool. The Lifeguard noticed that he had not swum back to the other end of the pool so got down from his chair and spotted him under water at the deep end.

He and another lifeguard pulled him out and started CPR, while at the same time calling for an ambulance. He remained unconscious. The nearest hospital could not admit him, and it was about an hour before he arrived at the next hospital. By the time his family arrived the hospital clinicians sadly informed them, following a CT scan, that there was no sign of brain activity. Sometime later his heart stopped, but they were able to get it going again. Two hours after that it happened again, and the hospital staff then suggested to his wife that if it stopped a third time, she might consider agreeing to them not attempting further resuscitation.

She refused, and when it did stop the third time, he was again resuscitated (with difficulty). Nonetheless they advised against keeping him on life support because the position was hopeless: he would pass away peacefully within the next two hours.

In the early morning his son, who by then was by his bedside - he had been there all night reading him articles from *Classic Car Magazine* – heard him groaning. Then quite suddenly Brian came round, groggy but mentally alert except that he had lost his memory which he regained after an operation on a ruptured subarachnoid artery.

Brian was an enormous help to new members of the Law Society Council (myself included). He is also 76, but in both looks and mental acuity would pass easily for 56. He now intends to keep himself busy by writing a book.

The reality now is that old age is no longer an absolute quality - if it ever was. Much has been made of our ageing population. I have known solicitors in their thirties with the mental ossification of people twice their age. And there are others, like Brian Hughes, who never seem to grow old, however many calendar years they have behind them.

The house husband

Only today I had an email from a good solicitor friend announcing that he had retired at 65, and that he was starting his new career as house husband doing the cleaning and ironing.

I actually like working. I get a buzz out of winning cases and I am kept humble by the occasional defeat or grumbles from clients. I don't know if I will be in such good shape by the time I reach 76 but I intend to give it a shot and I invite fellow SolicitOAPs to do the same. Come on crinkleys, let's give the world what for!

Besides, if I gave up now, would the editor want me to write every month about how I singed a brand new shirt or sewed on a new fly button? I suspect not. [It could be a 'career change' column - Ed.]

All the same I shall enjoy firing off a few angry letters to our local paper as an outraged OAP, though I think I might still draw the line at procreation. I will leave that to older men. I will just take the flowers.



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